

# TRANSLATIO STUDII: THE CONTRIBUTION OF EXILES TO THE ESTABLISHMENT OF SOCIOLOGY AND ART HISTORY IN BRITAIN, 1933-1960

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**RESUMEN:** Este ensayo es una pequeña parte de una historia más amplia, la gran diáspora de intelectuales del Centro y Este de Europa en los años treinta, hacia Gran Bretaña, EEUU, Francia, América latina, etc. El exilio puede ser observado como una escuela, una forma de educación de adultos, no sólo para los propios exiliados sino también para algunos de los nativos que llegaron a conocerlos. De forma más precisa, consideramos las consecuencias intelectuales de la diáspora en una cultura insular, con mención especial a dos disciplinas relativamente nuevas y pequeñas. La sociología y la historia del arte estaban en los años treinta mucho más desarrolladas en Europa central de lo que lo estaban en las islas Británicas, permitiendo a algunos destacados inmigrantes realizar una desproporcionada contribución si tenemos en cuenta su número. ¿Cómo se establece una nueva disciplina? Lo que se ofrece en este ensayo es una suerte de historia social o de sociología histórica tanto de la Historia del Arte como de la misma Sociología, sugiriendo que la contribución de los exiliados puede ser vista no como una simple transferencia de conocimiento, sino más bien como un encuentro cultural que supuso cambios en ambas partes, en una especie de hibridación cultural.

**PALABRAS CLAVE:** Sociología e Historia del Arte en Gran Bretaña; exilio en los años treinta; hibridación cultural.

The story I should like to tell here is a small part of a larger one, the Great Diaspora of central and east European intellectuals in the 1930s, to Britain, USA, France, Latin America etc.

Different stories can be told about these exiles or "refugees". Personal stories about survival and adaptation, like the four imagined life-histories in W. G. Sebald's *The Emigrants* (1997). Social stories about networks established in the new country<sup>1</sup>. Cultural stories focussing on the exiles as immigrants rather than emigrants, on their encounter with the host cultures. Exile may be regarded as a school, a form of adult education, not only for the exiles themselves but also for some of the natives who came to know them.

# TRASLATIO STUDII: CONTRIBUCIÓN DE LOS EXILIOS AL ESTABLECIMIENTO DE LA SOCIOLOGÍA Y LA HISTORIA DEL ARTE EN GRAN BRETAÑA, 1933-1960

**ABSTRACT:** This story is a small part of a larger one, the Great Diaspora of central and east European intellectuals in the 1930s, to Britain, USA, France, Latin America etc. Exile may be regarded as a school, a form of adult education, not only for the exiles themselves but also for some of the natives who came to know them. Focussing still more sharply, let us consider the intellectual consequences of the diaspora on an insular culture, with special reference to two relatively new and small disciplines. Both sociology and art history were more highly developed in central Europe in the 1930s than they were in Britain, allowing a few remarkable immigrants to make a contribution quite disproportionate to their numbers. How does one establish a new discipline? In short, what is offered here is a kind of social history or historical sociology of both art history and sociology itself, suggesting that the contribution of the exiles should be regarded not a simple import or transfer of knowledge but rather as a cultural encounter leading to changes on both sides, to a kind of cultural hybridization.

**KEY WORDS:** Sociology and Art History in Britain; exile in the 1930s, cultural hybridization.

In what follows I shall focus on Britain and on the reception of the exiles, where they found a warm reception at least in some places<sup>2</sup>. Thanks to Sir William Beveridge, Director of the LSE, and others, an Academic Assistance Council was founded in 1933, renamed in 1936 the "Society for the Protection of Science and Learning"<sup>3</sup>.

Focussing still more sharply, let us consider the intellectual consequences of the diaspora on an insular culture, with special reference to two relatively new and small disciplines. Both sociology and art history were more highly developed in central Europe in the 1930s than they were in Britain, allowing a few remarkable immigrants to make a contribution quite disproportionate to their numbers.

How does one establish a new discipline? The alternatives are either a first generation of people trained in other disciplines or a first generation of people trained in other countries, as in the case of the exiles from Central Europe.

In short, what is offered here is a kind of social history or historical sociology of both art history and sociology itself, suggesting that the contribution of the exiles should be regarded not a simple import or transfer of knowledge but rather as a cultural encounter leading to changes on both sides, to a kind of cultural hybridization<sup>4</sup>.

# I

In 1933 sociology occupied a very small place in the British academic world. There was a tradition of social surveys, empirical, pragmatic research on social conditions of the kind carried out by Beatrice Potter (later Beatrice Webb), in East London at the turn of the century. A Sociological Society was founded 1903 and a journal in 1908. A chair in sociology at the London School of Economics (LSE) was founded in 1907 and its first holder, Leonard Hobhouse, was a former journalist best known as a liberal thinker and politician. He was succeeded in 1929 by his former assistant Morris Ginsberg, an emigrant from Lithuania.

A remarkable feature of the LSE was the welcome it extended to exiles and in particular to Jewish scholars, not only to what we might call the "generation of 1933" but earlier. The historian Lewis Namier (formerly Lev Nemirovski, from Poland) was there from 1907 onwards, Ginsberg from 1914, the Polish anthropologist Bronisław Malinowski from c1922, the Austrian economist Friedrich Hayek from 1931. There was even a plan to transport the Institut für Sozialforschung, home of the famous "Frankfurt school" of sociology, to the LSE<sup>5</sup>.

Of the provincial universities, three are particularly worth mentioning. Birmingham University (where the German sociologist Wilhelm Baldamus found a post), was particularly welcoming to exiles. Manchester took another sociologist, Werner Stark. Most important of all was the University College of Leicester: the Russian Ilya Neustadt was appointed lecturer in sociology there, first teaching

the subject on his own and then appointing the German Norbert Elias as his colleague.

Any assessment of the intellectual influence of the exiles cannot confine itself to universities but must consider publishing as well. The British intellectual Herbert Read was a literary adviser for Routledge and helped get books by Karl Popper published there. Mannheim developed a special relationship with Routledge, editing a series and inviting Arnold Hauser (an exile he had known in Hungary at the house of György Lukács) to write for it – producing what became his famous social history of art. Friedrich Antal, another member of the Budapest circle, also published with Routledge<sup>6</sup>.

A generation later, by the mid-60s, there were about 180 students of sociology at Leicester, which had been promoted from a university college to a university. A number of sociologists who became well-known later were junior colleagues (Martin Albrow, Tony Giddens, John Goldthorpe and Keith Hopkins) or students (Eric Dunning Stephen Mennell, John Scotson, Bryan Wilson) of Elias and Neustadt there.

Mannheim was invited to join "the Moot", a club of the political and intellectual elite that included the poet (T. S. Eliot). He became influential in Britain, especially among those concerned with education. Basil Bernstein, later a famous sociologist of education, was a student who listened to Mannheim's lectures. The British historian Peter Laslett, having read *Ideology & Utopia*, "sought out" Mannheim as supervisor in 1939, "in revolt" against Cambridge-style history and its "muddled ... empiricism", as he later recalled<sup>7</sup>. Laslett admitted his debt to Mannheim's way of thinking, and like him wrote on generations.

It would be a mistake to paint too rosy a picture. The achievements of the exiles were not always recognized in their new country. Elias was 57 before he was appointed to a permanent position. Mannheim was only a lecturer for twelve years following his arrival in Britain. He felt that he was not taken seriously in his new home<sup>8</sup>. He complained in 1938 about the problem of explaining the sociology of knowledge to the British, what he called both "the urgent need" and "the great difficulty of translating one culture in terms of another". A certain British antipathy to sociology, viewed as too general, abstract and theoretical, has often

been noted. The caricature of the sociologist in Malcolm Bradbury's first novel, *Eating People is Wrong* (1959) is revealing. He is a Central European with a foreign accent. Sociology was still perceived as alien.

## II

It is time to turn to the state of art history in Britain in 1933. A tradition of connoisseurship, empirical and pragmatic, did exist, the equivalent for art history of the tradition of social surveys for sociology. Museums, galleries and art schools rather than universities (apart from Edinburgh, where a chair in art history was founded in 1879) were the places where the subject was generally studied<sup>9</sup>. The situation was very different from Germany and Austria, where art history was already a well-established discipline at universities (with chairs at Berlin from 1844, Vienna from 1852, Bonn from 1860)<sup>10</sup>.

The art historian Kenneth Clark, for instance, read history at Oxford but learned his connoisseurship at the Ashmolean Museum there and also from the exile Bernhard Berenson. Clark was employed at the Ashmolean and then the National Gallery. William Constable was trained as a painter, became a tour guide at the Wallace Collection, then worked at the National Gallery and finally a professor of art history in 1931.

Change was just beginning in 1933. A chair in art history was established at the Slade School of Art in 1922, while the Courtauld Institute was founded in 1932, funded by the businessman Samuel Courtauld. Himself from a family of Huguenot exiles – of the seventeenth century – Courtauld did a good deal to help Central European scholars who sought refuge in England. The management committee of the Courtauld, of which Constable was the first Director, included Lionel Robbins (above), and its staff came to include the exiles Frederick Antal (c.1933), Ernst Gombrich (c.1939), Otto Kurz (c.1939), Otto Pächt (1940) and Johannes Wilde (1948).

Courtauld also played a major role in the transplantation from Hamburg to England of the Institut Warburg, where the founder, Aby Warburg, together with Ernst Cassirer, Erwin Panofsky and Fritz Saxl, had formed an important in-

tellectual circle. Saxl asked Kenneth Clark for help to move the Warburg to England. Clark went to see the Chairman of Courtaulds, Arthur Lee, who arranged it. After its arrival the Warburg was linked to the Courtauld, publishing a joint *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* from 1940 onwards. Exiles who worked there included Gertrud Bing, Leopold Ettlinger, Ernst Gombrich, William Heckscher and Edgar Wind. The Institute became a centre of assistance to other exiles<sup>11</sup>. "The Warburg", as it came to be known, was incorporated into London University in 1944. I can hearing German spoken in the reading room in the 1960s, especially by the librarian, A. A. Barb.

From 1949 onwards the Slade chair in art history was held by the exile Rudolf Wittkower, and then by another exile, Leopold Ettlinger. A chair at Oxford was founded in the middle of the fifties especially for Edgar Wind, with the support of prominent Oxford figures such as Isaiah Berlin, an exile himself (from Riga, earlier in the twentieth century). The publisher Stanley Unwin helped Béla Horowitz set up the Phaidon Press, which specialized in books on art, in association with Ludwig Goldscheider (both men came from Budapest). Their rival as publishers of art books, Thames and Hudson, was founded in 1949 by Walter Neurath, an émigré from Vienna.

## III

It would be misleading to suggest that it was easy for the outsiders to establish themselves in Britain. Ettlinger, for instance, was a social worker for refugee children from Germany and a schoolmaster in Birmingham before he became an art historian. Betty Kurth, an expert on medieval tapestry, found only part-time employment in Glasgow<sup>12</sup>. Viola Klein, who suffered from the additional disadvantage of being female, worked as a nanny, translator and teacher before her appointment at the age of 56 as lecturer in sociology at Reading<sup>13</sup>. The fact that a number of the exiles emigrated twice, leaving England for the USA, suggests that they did not feel at home in their new environment.

There were a few open clashes between the "established" and the "outsiders" (terms Elias used in a later study but which may have been inspired by the experience of exile).

One such clash involved John Betjeman (a poet and a self-consciously amateur critic of architecture) and Nikolaus Pevsner (whom Betjeman called "that dull pedant from Prussia" or "the Professor-Doktor")<sup>14</sup>. At the LSE, there were frequent clashes between the older émigré Morris Ginsberg and the newer one, Karl Mannheim. More generally, the relatively methodical and theoretical approach of the exiles met with resistance from some "natives". As Saxl remarked after arriving in his new home, "Theories are abhorred by the English in general and by the learned in particular"<sup>15</sup>.

On the other hand, some scholars welcomed the new approaches, among them Constable and Clark. The latter believed that the English tradition of connoisseurship was "practically exhausted", and confessed that hearing a lecture by Warburg (in Hamburg) had changed his life, shifting him from connoisseurship to iconography (he later described the chapter on "Pathos" in his *The Nude* (1956) as "entirely Warburgian")<sup>16</sup>. Anthony Blunt (Director of Courtauld Institute) and John Berger both testified to the importance of Frederick Antal for their intellectual development. Johannes Wilde at the Courtauld taught John Shearman and other leading British art historians. The effect that Gombrich had on one of the most gifted British art historians, Michael Baxandall may be seen in the vocabulary that the latter used in his *Painting and Experience in Renaissance Italy* (1972); references to the "language" of art, the "reading" of paintings, the idea of art as an "institution" and that of the "expectations" of the viewer, all echoes of the language of Gombrich in *Art and Illusion* (1960) and elsewhere.

#### IV

Finally, a few general remarks. The first concerns the importance of mediators who took up particular exiles and helped their careers. J. M. Keynes helped Werner Stark (as well as the Hungarian economist Thomas Balogh and others), Kenneth Clark helped Johannes Wilde, Thomas Boase (Director of the Courtauld 1937-47), helped Otto Demus, Isaiah Berlin and Maurice Bowra helped Wind. Some exiles assisted others. Ettlinger lived with Saxl, while Pevsner got him a job as social worker. Ernst Kris helped his cousin Betty Kurth establish herself in Britain.

Important elements in the intellectual baggage of the exiles were method and theory. Anthony Blunt, for instance, acknowledged that what he had learned from Antal was "method" – though this was also a discreet way of referring to the Marxism he shared with his teacher<sup>17</sup>.

Academic sociology may be regarded as a translation of the pragmatic knowledge of society, while academic art history translated connoisseurship. The key figures in these "translations" were the exiles, individuals who had themselves been "translated" in the original sense of the term. Hence the title of this paper, *Translatio studii*.

The exiles came from a milieu where both art history and sociology were more highly developed and professionalized than they were in Britain, so they passed on new standards of scholarship. What they contributed might be described in social terms as professionalization, in intellectual terms as a sense of *Wissenschaft*. The exiles also helped to deprovincialize British academic culture. Pevsner, for example, compared the Durham cathedral complex to the papal palace and Avignon and lectured on what the natives had taken for granted, "the Englishness of English art", while Willy Guttsman analysed the English ruling class.

As in the USA, the exiles were able to contribute rather more to art history than to sociology, whether because of the charisma of individuals such as Wind or because an exiled institution such as the Warburg can influence the host culture more deeply than even charismatic individuals can.

However, the influence was not all one-way. Paul Hoch has described the Central European émigré scientists of this period as "bridge-builders" in physics, making a "synthesis" between German theoretical and British experimental traditions<sup>18</sup>.

In the case of sociology and art history, intellectual hybridization is equally visible. On one side we see the professionalization or even the Germanization of the disciplines. Pevsner, for instance, was critical of the British amateur tradition in art<sup>19</sup>.

On the other side we see the assimilation or Anglicization of the émigrés, with knighthoods for Sir Nikolaus Pevsner, Sir Ernst Gombrich and others. Pevsner in par-

ticular became a British institution thanks to his series of architectural guides to the counties of England. "Look it up in Pevsner", the English still say. Some exiles such as the historian Geoffrey Elton (originally Gerhard Ehrenberg), tried to become more English than the English, a hyper-empiricist, devoted to what he called "our history".

Synthesis was of course far from perfect. Something was "lost in translation", something else was consciously rejected. We should distinguish the students who became followers of exile intellectuals (notably in the case of Elias) from those who disagreed with their teachers and so were affected in more subtle ways (Goldthorpe reacting against Elias, Tom Bottomore against Mannheim).

The careers of the individuals mentioned in this paper illustrate what sociologists have called "the role of the

émigré or outsider in catalyzing intellectual and social development", the "distinctive and interactive roles" of insiders and outsiders<sup>20</sup>. As so often happens, the agents themselves preceded the sociologists in this insight. The émigré publisher George Weidenfeld describes himself as having "yearned... to turn my condition of being with the English but not of the English into an advantage". He did so.

If exile often brought unhappiness to the émigrés, the diaspora was more positive for the host country. I make this remark with feeling since my own career forms a small part of this English reception of foreign ideas. My first steps in art history were helped by Edgar Wind and Hans Hess, and in sociology by Norman Birnbaum and Zevedei Barbu, exiles all four. This paper is a tribute to them and their colleagues.

## NOTAS

- 1 Jennifer Platt, "Some Issues in Intellectual Method and Approach", in Edward Timms and Jon Hughes (eds.), *Intellectual Migration and Cultural Transformation* (Vienna and New York, 2003), 7-20, at 17. Friedrich Stadler (2003), "The Wiener Kreis in Great Britain", in *Timms and Hughes*, 155-80, at 169, 179. My thanks to Jennifer Platt for reading this paper and for letting me see her unpublished inaugural lecture, "Ideas on the Move".
- 2 For a general account, see Dan Snowman, *The Hitler émigrés: the cultural impact on Britain of refugees from Nazism* (London, 2002).
- 3 Christian Fleck, "The Role of Refugee Help Organizations", in *Timms and Hughes*, 21-36, at 21-6.
- 4 On the need to consider changes in both "migrants" and "natives", *Platt* (2003), 13-14.
- 5 Ralf Dahrendorf, *LSE: a history of the London School of Economics and Po-*

*litical Science, 1895-1995* (Oxford, 1995), 290-3.

- 6 More generally, see Uwe Westphal, "German Czech and Austrian Jews in English Publishing", in Julius Carlebach et al. (eds.), *Second Chance: Two Centuries of German-speaking Jews in the UK* (Tübingen, 1991), 195-208.
- 7 Peter Laslett, "Karl Mannheim in 1939: a student's recollection", *Revue Européenne des Sciences Sociales et Cahiers Vilfredo Pareto*, 17 (1979), 223-6.
- 8 Timms and Hughes (2003), 205.
- 9 Johannes Feichtinger, "The Significance of Austrian Emigré Art Historians for English Art Scholarship", in *Timms and Hughes*, 51-70, at 52.
- 10 Wolfgang Beyrodt, "Kunstgeschichte als Universitätsfach" in Peter Ganz et al. (eds.), *Kunst und Kunsttheorie* (Wiesbaden, 1991).
- 11 Dorothea McEwan, "Mapping the Trade Routes of the Mind: the Warburg Institute", in *Timms and Hughes*, 37-50, at 45.

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- 13 Marion Berghahn, "Women Emigrés in England", in S. Quack (ed.), *Between Sorrow and Strength* (Cambridge, 1995); Andrea Hammel, "Gender and Migration", in *Timms and Hughes*, 207-18, at 211.
- 14 Tim Mowl, *Stylistic Cold Wars: Betje-man versus Pevsner* (London, 2000).
- 15 Quoted in McEwan, 42.
- 16 Feichtinger, 55-6; Kenneth Clark, *Another Part of the Wood* (London, 1974).
- 17 Anthony Blunt, *Artistic Theory in Italy, 1450-1600* (Oxford, 1940), preface.
- 18 Paul K. Hoch, "Migration and the Generation of New Scientific Ideas", *Minerva* 25 (1985), 209-37.
- 19 "On Germanization and Anglicization", *Platt* (2003), 14.
- 20 Robert Merton, "Insiders and Outsiders: a chapter in the sociology of knowledge", *American Journal of Sociology* 78 (1972) 9-47; Arnold Thackray and Robert K. Merton, "On Discipline Building: the Paradoxes of George Sarton", *Isis* 63 (1972), 473-95.